

Remarks

Claims 1-20 are pending in this application. Applicant has amended claims 1-4, 6, 8, 12, and 20 to clarify the present invention. Applicant respectfully requests favorable reconsideration of this application.

Regarding the objection to the claims. Applicant has amended the claims where appropriate to express method steps in method claims as gerunds or verbal nouns. Applicant has amended the dependency of claim 12 so that antecedent basis exists for "the emulsion-breaking unit". Applicant has not amended claim 15 because antecedent basis exists for "the emulsion-breaking unit" in line 2. In view of the above, Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the objection to the claims.

The present invention as recited in independent claims 1 and 8 relates to a method and system for separation of the phases of a multiphase fluid from one or more wells. The multiphase fluid is conducted to at least two gravity separators either in parallel or in series depending on the properties of the well fluid and process conditions. Thus, the present invention as recited in independent claims 1 and 8 can provide a single system that, thanks to its interchangeable configuration of gravity separators, may be used for different purposes depending on wellstream characteristics without any or with minimum intervention activity. The present invention can provide a higher availability and flexibility and permit a lower total volume and weight to be achieved.

The flexibility of the present invention is particularly apparent in the description of an embodiment including four gravity separators on pages 10 and 11 of the specification. In particular, as described in that passage, two, three or four of the gravity separators may be arranged in parallel or in series. The valving of the system may be arranged such that the fluid may be directed to any arrangement of gravity separators as desired.

The Examiner rejected claims 1-3, 6-10, and 18-20 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. patent 5,302,294 to Schubert et al. The Examiner rejected claims 8, 11, and 17 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. patent 2,773,556 to Meyers et al.

Schubert et al. does not disclose the present invention as recited in independent claims 1 or 8 since, among other things, Schubert et al. does not disclose a method that includes conducting a multiphase fluid from one or more wells to a plurality of gravity separators either simultaneously or sequentially depending upon properties of the well fluid and process conditions. Rather, Schubert et al. discloses a cyclonic separation system. Interchangeability of process modules is not possible in a cyclonic system, because a first stage separator is very different from a second stage separator or a deoiler. Also, Schubert et al. appears to disclose only a series arrangement of elements. The present invention takes advantage of the ability to utilize gravity separators in all different process steps. The present invention also provides a unique system design, wherein a totally flexible system regarding interchangeable configurations of gravity separators and a more robust system than exists today are achieved. Therefore, Schubert et al. does not disclose the present invention as recited in claims 1 or 8 or claims 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 18-20, which depend from claims 1 and 8.

Meyers et al. does not disclose the present invention as recited in claim 8 since, among other things, Meyers et al. does not disclose a system for separating the phases of a multiphase fluid from one or more wells that includes means for conducting the fluid to at least one first gravity separator and at least one second gravity separator simultaneously or sequentially depending on properties of the well fluid and process conditions. The Examiner cites col. 1, lines 63-64 as disclosing parallel first and second gravity separators. This passage merely describes directing wells that produce little if any water to storage tanks without treatment or separation. Such does not disclose conducting fluid to at least one first gravity separator and at least one second gravity separator simultaneously or sequentially depending on properties of the well fluid and process conditions. Meyers et al. does not disclose parallel distribution of fluid to a plurality of gravity separators or means for carrying out such parallel distribution. Rather, it appear as if Meyers et al. discloses separately treating two different wellstreams, and not sharing a common mix of wellstreams. Interchangeability in the direction of the fluid is a significant feature of the present invention that can not be achieved in the invention of Meyers et al.

In view of the above, neither Schubert et al. nor Meyers et al. discloses all elements of the present invention as recited in claims 1-20. Since neither Schubert et al. nor Meyers et al. discloses all elements of the present invention as recited in claims 1-20, the present invention, as recited in claims 1-20, is not properly rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b). For an anticipation rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) no difference may exist between the claimed invention and the reference disclosure. *See Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation v. Genentech, Inc.*, 18 U.S.P.Q. 841 (C.A.F.C. 1984).

Along these lines, anticipation requires the disclosure, in a cited reference, of each and every recitation, as set forth in the claims. *See Hodosh v. Block Drug Co.*, 229 U.S.P.Q. 182 (Fed. Cir. 1986); *Titanium Metals Corp. v. Banner*, 227 U.S.P.Q. 773 (Fed. Cir. 1985); *Orthokinetics, Inc. v. Safety Travel Chairs, Inc.*, 1 U.S.P.Q.2d 1081 (Fed. Cir. 1986); and *Akzo N.V. v. U.S. International Trade Commissioner*, 1 U.S.P.Q.2d 1081 (Fed. Cir. 1986).

In view of the above, neither of the references relied upon in the office action discloses patentable features of the present invention. Therefore, neither of the references relied upon in the office action anticipates the present invention. Accordingly, Applicant submits that the present invention is patentable over the cited references.

If an interview would advance the prosecution of this application, Applicant respectfully urges the Examiner to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

The undersigned authorizes the Commissioner to charge insufficient fees and credit overpayment associated with this communication to Deposit Account No. 22-0261.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: _____

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